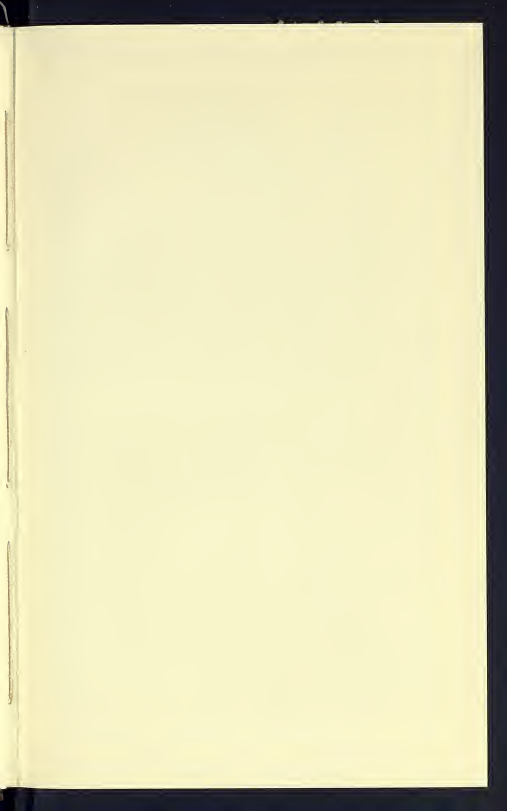
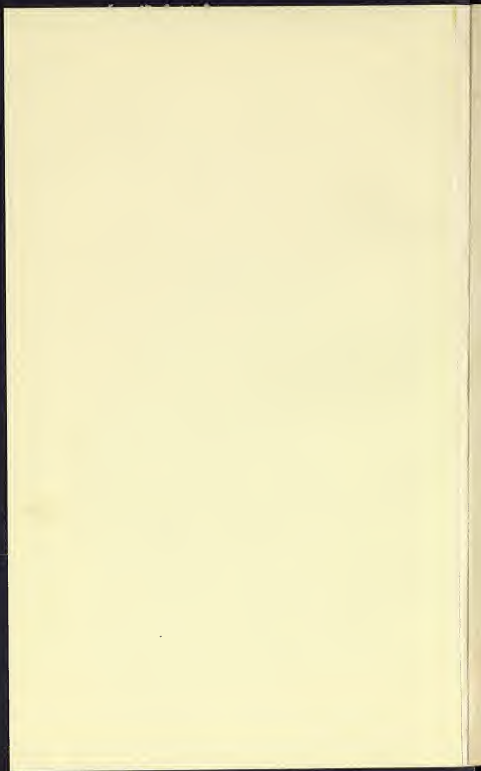


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LETTER

FROM

AN IRISH PROPRIETOR

TO THE

MINISTERS OF RELIGION

OF THE DISTRICT.

LONDON:

J. BIGG AND SON, PARLIAMENT STREET.

HODGES AND SMITH, DUBLIN.

G. M'KERN, LIMERICK.

1847.

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L E T T E R
FROM
AN IRISH PROPRIETOR
TO THE
MINISTERS OF RELIGION
OF THE DISTRICT.

MY REVEREND FRIENDS,

I ADDRESS these observations to you because I well know the deep interest which you take in the welfare of all those who are committed to your charge, and because I am confident that you will not despise any suggestions which may enable you to direct your exertions into that course which shall lead to the most useful practical results.

Although connected myself with the class of landed proprietors, I am no apologist of harsh or negligent landlords. I am fully sensible of the responsibility that rests upon them, and of the duties which belong to their position; and if they fail to perform these to the utmost of their power, I am not sorry that the just force of public opinion should be employed to expose and condemn them.

I am, however, anxious to mark the distinctions between that which they *can* do, and that which,

with the best intentions and with their utmost efforts, they are unable to effect without the assistance of others. I wish to do this with a twofold purpose.

I hope that by such means I may assist in removing from the general body of Irish landlords some portion of the odium that is too generally cast upon them, as a body, by English writers and speakers; and I further trust that a calm review of some of the most prominent of the difficulties that impede the exertions of the best disposed proprietors in Ireland may induce those who, like yourselves, reside and exercise influence amongst the people, to lend their powerful aid to procure that co-operation of all classes, without which no useful or permanent improvement in the social condition of Ireland can be made.

I cannot touch upon this subject without bearing my willing testimony to the patient endurance and general good conduct evinced by the peasantry and poorer classes of our district. Hitherto the outrages which disgrace most parts of the neighbourhood have not reached our immediate locality: I am proud of, and grateful for, this distinction.

I attribute it mainly to two causes,—viz., 1st, to the kind advice and considerate exertions of the ministers of religion; and, 2ndly, to a confidence in the anxious wish and earnest endeavours of all those who have any power or influence, to mitigate as far as possible the pressure of distress.

Within the last two years a vast deal has been

said and written about Ireland.—In the senate, at public meetings, and through the press, pictures have been exhibited, unfortunately too faithful, of the distress and misery prevalent in that country. Whatever difference of opinion may prevail as to the more remote causes that have rendered the failure of one species of food so fatal in its consequences, and so general in its operation upon all classes of society, there cannot now be any doubt as to the existence and the wide-spreading nature of the evil.

Neither does any difference of opinion appear to prevail as to the general nature of the remedy that is required—employment of the people; such employment as shall enable the masses to earn wages to purchase food. This is spoken of universally as the one object to be aimed at, and to which all efforts ought to be directed, and without which, no hope of improvement in the social condition of the country can be expected.

Thus far all are agreed.

But when we look a little further on, and apply ourselves to consider in what manner and by what means this most desirable end is to be attained, we cannot fail to encounter very great difficulties in the solution of this question.

It is true that one language is very generally holden here upon this point—one cry is very generally raised:—The landlords must provide employment for the people; the landlords must find work or

food for all those living upon their estates, who have not other means of subsistence.

I am as ready as any person to admit that a strong obligation and heavy responsibility rests upon the landlords in this respect; but I know that those who are loudest in the cry would find it difficult, in a great majority of cases, to point out in what manner, in the present state of society in Ireland, the landlord, with the best intentions, can discharge himself of the obligation. In truth, it is generally impossible that he should do this, unless he can secure the willing co-operation of all the other classes. Unfortunately this co-operation is too often withheld; and without it, in nine cases out of ten, a landlord is utterly powerless.

The truth of these general allegations will be at once apparent by reference to a few examples.

Let us take, first, the case of the landlord owning 5000 acres of land, of average quality, let at fair rents.

We will suppose this property held in farms, averaging twenty-five acres each; some being as low as five, some as high as 50 or 100 acres. You will admit that this is no extravagant supposition, but rather a favourable view of the case. Ordinarily, there are also, besides the tenants, a considerable number of poor families, occupying either small patches of land, improperly sublet to them, or depending upon con-acre land for subsistence. Upon the failure

of the potato crop, this whole class is at once driven to depend upon money wages or gratuitous relief; but the small farmers—and I fear I may say, also, most of the large farmers—have never been accustomed to pay money wages. Many of them cannot do it, all of them would consider it as money lost, and few of them are prepared to turn to profitable account the labour which might be thus procured.

The landlord occupies probably 200 or 300 acres, and employs upon these twice the number of labourers which a renting farmer would employ. But this is as a drop of water in the ocean. How are the others to be employed?

The landlord cannot set them to work upon the lands occupied by his tenants without their assent. If they offer no direct obstacle to such employment, yet, in very many instances, they decline to pay him that fair return for his capital expended, without which he cannot proceed to any considerable extent.

Other impediments are frequently thrown in his way. The farms of A and B are so situated that the one cannot be effectually drained unless an outlet be made through the other. Permission for this is too often refused.

The lands of the two farms are intermingled in such a way as to render the access to both inconvenient. There are many useless fences, occupying much valuable ground: the destruction of some of them, and a new arrangement of the fields, would fur-

nish employment for many men for months, and would greatly improve both farms. The landlord would gladly employ men upon these works, but he must borrow the money, and the tenants refuse to pay common interest for the outlay.

They further object to any alteration of fences which would give to A one rood of land which has hitherto been held by B, or to the destruction of any fence which existed in the time of their fathers.

This is not a fanciful picture: your experience of the country, and knowledge of the people, will satisfy you that such instances frequently occur.

Or, let us take another case, of which there are numerous examples in the south-west and west of Ireland. A B is the proprietor of an estate of 10,000 acres, of which one half is lowland, and under some sort of cultivation, and is very thickly inhabited, having many more persons living upon it than its produce can maintain, under even the best system of management. The other half consists of 5000 acres, of which the greater part is waste or mountain land, and the whole of this moiety is tenanted by six or seven tenants, holding 700 or 800 acres each. The farmer occupying such a tract, usually cultivates only a small portion of it, perhaps 200 acres, and he occupies the remainder by turning cattle upon it during three or four of the driest months in the year. Such tracts are also, in general, very thinly peopled.

It is obvious that tracts of land such as I have now described do not contribute towards the maintenance of the people, or the general resources of the country, one-fourth part of what might be produced from them under a proper system; and it is equally certain that no improved system can be applied to them without the co-operation of all classes, including landlord, tenant, and labourer, and yet such co-operation is in such cases rarely obtained. Sometimes the proprietor, acting too hastily in pursuit of what he feels to be a laudable object, raises up impediments to his own proceedings, and makes enemies of those whose assistance he might by a more conciliatory course have secured. Sometimes the tenant obstinately refuses to give up possession of an acre of the land, or to pay a farthing of interest upon the money to be expended upon it; sometimes, even the cottier, who drags on a miserable existence in some mud cabin, upon the wettest part of the land, refuses to exchange this for a good cottage, with the prospect of regular labour, if called upon to move a quarter of a mile from the accustomed spot.

Such are some of the difficulties which too often stand in the way of agricultural improvement in Ireland. I have been led more particularly to consider and to lament these at the present time, from the circumstance of my having recently visited a part of Scotland which presents many points of similarity to some districts in the west and south-west of Ireland,

but exhibits in its present appearance a strong contrast to anything that we can witness in that country. The most striking instance of successful exertions in agricultural improvement with which I am acquainted, is to be seen upon the Gordon estate, in the counties of Aberdeen, Banff, and Moray, now in the possession of the Duke of Richmond, who succeeded to it in the year 1836, upon the death of his uncle, the last Duke of Gordon.

That estate, besides a large extent of forest and wild mountain, comprises many thousand acres of cultivated land and improvable wastes. These parts of the property the present owner, on succeeding to it, found in a very unsatisfactory state, yet offering a field for extensive improvement. Being fond of agricultural pursuits, and having some experience in them, the Duke of Richmond at once perceived how much might be done, but he prudently took some time, to consider of the best plan of proceeding. In the year 1841, he commenced a system of improvement which has been steadily pursued to the present time.

The lowland part of the estate was for the most part under some sort of cultivation. But there was no system or well arranged course of management. The farms were generally small, many of them being mere cottier holdings, or what in that country are denominated crofts.

The first step was to ascertain by valuation the fair rent to be fixed upon the lands. The next, to

lay down upon a plan the whole district, as it might be advantageously divided into farms convenient for occupation, and varying in size. After these preparations, a new arrangement of the whole was gradually made as opportunities occurred, upon the falling in of existing leases.

In the course of this operation it was necessary to remove many persons from their small holdings. Great objection was in many instances made to this by the occupiers, but nothing of violent opposition was displayed. Various modes of providing for those who were so removed, were adopted by the landlord, and the most kind and conciliatory methods employed in making the necessary changes. As year by year the advantages of the new system became more apparent, in the improved appearance of the country and the increased amount of produce, the objections became less frequent, and all parties became gradually reconciled to alterations of which it was impossible to deny the beneficial results. Many young men who, in the former state of things, resided with and assisted their father in the mismanagement of his little holding, passing the residue of their time in idleness, now reside in new and cheerful cottages, and find constant employment at good wages under more experienced and substantial farmers.

Many of the farms are still of a smaller size than it would be desirable to have them, but this evil could not be remedied without the infliction of some hard-

ship upon some old tenants, by insisting upon their removal.

The new divisions being settled, the landlord and his agent proceeded actively, in conjunction with the tenants, to execute the improvements required. A vast deal of thorough draining has been done; a great many new fences have been made, and many old ones removed. Old cabins have been removed, and good cottages erected in the most convenient situations. Many farm buildings have been put up upon the most approved plans. In these works the landlord and tenants have jointly assisted. The terms of the agreements between them have not been always the same in all the details, but all have been framed upon the principle, which is well understood in Scotland, that the interests of all classes are bound up together, and that all ought to work together for the common good.

My remarks have hitherto been confined to the Lowland part of the Gordon estate. The same property comprises, as I have said, many thousand acres of mountains or wild land. This fact was particularly interesting to me, from its resemblance to large tracts of waste land with which I am familiar in Ireland. Here, also, the progress of improvement is very striking. There was nothing to be undone; no bad buildings to remove; no occupiers to dispossess. The whole was waste and undivided. Sufficient now remains unaltered to mark the contrast between the former

and the present state of the land. Farm after farm was laid out, varying in size, of which the external boundaries were made, and each of which was divided into five or ten closes, to be separated by proper fences as opportunity offers. Tenants of good character and industrious habits were placed upon each farm, with a decent house and sufficient farm buildings. Draining, where necessary, was done, and a rent fixed with reference to the state of the land, and to what had been done upon it. Some of these farms have been under cultivation for some years, others have been recently taken in hand, and it is most encouraging to observe how rapidly, under a proper system, the whole face of a country may be changed. Upon both parts of the Gordon estate to which I have referred, leases are given, containing covenants calculated to secure proper management, and most particularly a covenant to observe a rotation of crops, which, in that country, is justly considered to be of the utmost importance. Although the proper rotation must vary, in some degree, according to the variations of soil and climate, it may be useful to describe that one which experience has shown to be most beneficial in the districts above referred to. This commences with a crop of oats; this is followed by turnips, for which the land is prepared with great care, and highly manured. They are always sown in drill, and carefully and repeatedly thinned by hoeing. Sometimes the whole of the crop is fed off by sheep; at others, the plants are pulled from alter-

nate drills for feeding cattle in the house, and the remainder eaten by sheep on the ground. This crop is followed by a crop of barley, with which seeds of the best clover and rye-grass are sown; the land then remains in grass for two years, and the rotation begins again with a crop of oats.

Experience has so fully shown the advantage of this course, that the tenant rarely attempts to vary from it; if he does so without the consent of his landlord, the law of Scotland affords ready means of enforcing the covenant against him.

A reader in Ireland will perhaps be surprised to learn that the term of lease rarely, if ever, exceeds nineteen years; a Scotch farmer is well convinced that if he uses the land well, it will amply repay him, within that or a shorter period.

The results of the system thus pursued are apparent upon the whole of the estate referred to. They are shown in the improved condition of the people, the improved appearance of the country, and the great increase in the amount of human food produced from the soil; and it is impossible to witness, as I did, a large gathering of the Gordon tenants, without being forcibly struck by their looks of contentment and good humour, manifesting most clearly the confidence which they feel in the kindness of their landlord, and their sense of the advantage to be derived to themselves from the course in which they are mutually engaged.

My pleasure, however, in observing these improvements in Scotland was not unmixed with feelings of shame and regret.

The question constantly occurred to me,—Why is it that we cannot witness a similar scene in Ireland? We have a soil as good, or better. We have a climate more genial; we have a people who show themselves, in various parts of the world, to be intelligent, active, and laborious—why is it that, with these materials, we are unable to produce results similar to those exhibited in Scotland? An answer, I think, may be given from the preceding observations. In one country we see the exertions of the several classes of society combined to produce a common benefit to all; in the other, we too often see the efforts of one class paralyzed by the opposition or the neglect of others. But, again, I must not content myself with seeing that these things are so. I must consider if there be not some cause in operation which may by proper care be removed.

I believe that cause is to be found in the ignorance and want of instruction which too generally prevail, amongst the farming and peasant classes in Ireland, with respect to land. They have not been brought to see the advantage to themselves of the changes and improvements suggested; and not seeing this, they suspect that these are recommended only with a view to the benefit of their landlord or their neighbour.

Much, indeed, has been done of late years by various

societies towards the spreading of agricultural knowledge, but this has applied chiefly, although not entirely, to the higher class of farmers. A few agricultural schools have also been established, from the increase of which I should anticipate much benefit; but I fear that the intentions of the Government and the National Board in this respect have not been seconded so fully as might be wished by the landed proprietors.

In some parts, also, practical agriculturists have been introduced, many of them Irishmen, thoroughly well educated, and able to teach and to direct the most profitable modes of managing Irish farms. In our particular district, the means of agricultural instruction, under the able superintendence of Captain Kennedy, are amply provided for all those who will take advantage of them.

It is, however, by personal intercourse with individuals, by instruction from time to time as opportunities occur, by reference to examples which may illustrate and enforce the precepts given, that the removal of the ignorance complained of must be looked for. Most earnestly, therefore, do I entreat of *you*, and of your respected brethren, to apply yourselves zealously to the work which no other persons can perform so well, and thus to assist (as you may do most effectually) in promoting the welfare of all classes of the Irish people; for the interests of all are intimately connected. I hope and believe that

both the landlord and tenant class understand and acknowledge this truth better than it was understood by either of them twenty years ago.

And here, in passing, I must shortly advert to a matter which, although not immediately connected with the object of these observations, is of no less importance with reference to the subject of agricultural improvement. It sometimes happens that a tenant is willing to expend his own capital in the improvement of the farm which he holds at a yearly rent, and that it is convenient to the landlord to encourage such expenditure. In such cases, it is undoubtedly not only fair, but essential for the benefit of both parties, that an equitable agreement shall be made and strictly adhered to by both. The tenant may receive compensation for his outlay in either of two ways. He may either have secured to him such a length of term at the same rent, as may ensure to him a full return of principal and interest, from the increased produce of his improved farm, or he may, upon quitting the farm at an earlier period, receive in money the same compensation, or so much as has not been returned to him by the lengthened enjoyment of his farm. There is no difficulty in making agreements of this nature, upon fair and just principles; but in order to do this satisfactorily, both parties must come to the task with a desire to act upon some sound principles of calculation, and must make it their common object to preserve and secure

the just rights of both. The right of the tenant, in such case, is to have the full amount of his outlay upon permanent improvements, with liberal interest, returned to him, in one shape or another; and the right of the landlord is to have his land restored to him at the expiration of the term, without delay or obstruction. The social condition of Ireland will not be such as it ought to be until both these rights are habitually respected, and secured in practice, as well as in theory, by the law. It will frequently happen that your advice may be given with excellent effect in these cases.

But to return to the more immediate object of this letter, which is to direct your attention to that more numerous class of cases in which improvements are to be effected by the capital and the direct interference of the landlord.

I have endeavoured to show in what manner these are often impeded by the want of co-operation from other classes of the agricultural population. This is only to be obtained by showing to those classes that it is their interest to give it. To satisfy them upon this point, it may be necessary to enter upon some details; but these are simple, and easy of explanation. The Irish farmers and even peasants are very quick of apprehension, and pretty generally instructed in the elementary branches of education. They will readily understand particulars and calculations laid before them by those in whom they confide. How impor-

tant, then, is it that this kind office shall be undertaken by those to whom they are accustomed to look up as their friends and spiritual guides. They will often listen to and be convinced by you, when they would turn with distrust from the landlord or his agent seeking to impress the same truths upon them. Nor can you be at any loss for the information necessary to enable you to give correct advice. This is given in various publications, besides the mass of evidence upon the subject which is contained in the Appendix to the Land Commissioners' Report, which is now brought into a reasonable compass in the Digest recently published. Upon the point of interest or increased rent, the conclusion which may be fairly drawn from the whole evidence is, that a tenant may well afford to pay a fair interest upon money expended by his landlord upon permanent improvements, and at the same time derive to himself an increased profit from that outlay.

As, for instance: suppose a farmer to occupy twenty Irish acres of land of medium quality, at a rent of 20s. per acre, at which the land is fairly valued, the average gross produce of such a farm may be fairly taken to be 3*l.* per acre. The expenditure of 100*l.*, or 5*l.* per acre upon the average, will generally suffice to execute the essential improvements: that is, to thorough drain such parts as require it; to remove some useless fence, by which a considerable increase of ground for cultivation may be obtained;

and to erect, in a cheap manner, a shed for housing four or five cows. Upon a very moderate estimate, it may be calculated, that, after these improvements, the *gross* produce will be increased 10*l.*, or 10*s.* per acre; so that, if the tenant pays 5*l.* per cent upon the 100*l.*, in addition to his rent, he will gain to the extent of 5*l.* a year, without any outlay of capital on his part. He will derive a further advantage, in the easier cultivation of the land and the more healthy condition of his stock. I assume, further, that if a tenant is sufficiently well advised to enter into an agreement of this sort, he will also be prudent enough to adopt an improved mode of cultivation, particularly a rotation of crops, by which he will be enabled to keep his ground in good order; and two or three examples of this nature in a district, established by the combined exertions of landlord and tenant, will do more towards the general improvement of the country than volumes of writing, or the most impassioned speeches at a public meeting.

The same mode of calculation which I have here applied to an holding of twenty acres is applicable to larger and smaller farms: the exact amount by which the gross produce will be increased, by thorough draining and other improvements, will of course vary, but a very little examination of the subject will satisfy you, and those who will listen to your advice, that a tenant may safely undertake to pay a fair interest upon the money expended upon his farm. In many cases the landlord must himself pay a large interest

for the money which he so expends, and will therefore be unable to execute any improvements at all, unless he receives a corresponding return from the tenant. It must not, however, be supposed by any occupier of land, that the mere expenditure of money upon such improvements as I have described will permanently improve his condition, unless he is determined to apply himself with energy to the cultivation of his farm upon a better system than has been usually practised in Ireland. He will find his task easier than before; his crops not only larger, but earlier, and much more certain; and if a dairy farmer, he will certainly be able to keep one-third at least more of stock upon his land than when it was wet and unwholesome during half of the year, and he had no convenience for housing his cows.

Another class of cases to which some reference was made in a former part of this letter, consists of those in which a tenant holds a large tract of waste or unimproved land which he cannot cultivate, but of which he is unwilling to give up even a portion to his landlord or to a neighbour.

It would not be difficult to prove by actual calculation, that in most of such cases, independently of all other considerations, the motive of self-interest ought to induce the occupier to co-operate with the landlord in bringing such a tract into profitable cultivation, so as to secure to himself a better profit from a portion of it, whilst the residue may be rendered available for

the location and maintenance of some of his poorer neighbours.

The difficulty is to get the first step taken; to induce such an occupier to enter into calculations at all, or to entertain for a moment the idea of quitting his hold upon any portion of his waste and extended holding. In such cases your influence may be most valuable.

You may frequently be able to assist in bringing landlord and tenant into friendly intercourse. You will explain to all, in whatsoever class you may find them, who obstruct salutary measures of improvement, such as may lead to the employment of the people and the increase of food, that by such conduct they will forfeit the esteem of all good men, whilst they increase and perpetuate the wretchedness of all around them. You will also sometimes be enabled, by a few kind words of explanation and advice, to induce some poor cottier to acquiesce cheerfully in an arrangement for his removal, which at first he was disposed to consider an act of injustice towards him.

Thus in many various ways may your benevolent efforts be directed to promote the temporal welfare and happiness of the people.

Nor let it be imagined that the task which I wish you to undertake, in relation to the agricultural improvement of the country, is in any way foreign to the higher duties of your sacred calling. On the contrary, the advice and encouragement which I am

anxious that you should give, at this crisis, to your flocks, are in strict conformity with, and in furtherance of, the principles of religion which it is your duty and practice to inculcate. I presume only to point out some particular occasions on which you may enforce with peculiar advantage those principles which it is your habit to recommend.

I have endeavoured to direct your attention to some cases in which your efforts will be of more than ordinary value. You may, I doubt not, frequently succeed in substituting the dictates of reason and of prudence for the hasty conclusions and wild impulses of passion; you may introduce confidence and mutual good-will where jealousy and envy now prevail. Finally, you will lead your hearers, in their dealings about land, to do unto others as they would that men should do unto them. This will be, I am well assured, to all of you a grateful labour.

I trust that your exertions in so holy a cause may be blessed with success, and that each of you may long be spared to witness the happy results amongst a moral and enlightened people. Such is the hope and earnest prayer of

Your sincere friend,

DEVON.

London, November, 1847.





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